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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/13/2018  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [SY](#) [CA](#)  
SUBJECT: SYRIA REBUKES CANADA ON HUMAN RIGHTS STATEMENT

REF: A. OTTAWA 0172

[B](#). OTTAWA 0024  
[C](#). 07 STATE 171106

Classified By: PolMinCouns Scott Bellard, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#). (C) Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Director General for Middle East and North Africa Gordon Venner on February 13 shared with PolMinCouns a read-out from the Canadian Head of Mission in Damascus following the Canadian Embassy's January 31 statement of concern over Riad Seif's arrest as well as the overall human rights situation in Syria (ref a). Syrian MFA Chief of Protocol Abdul Latif Dabbagh on February 11 called in the HOM to express "the very strong indignation of Syrian authorities" at the Embassy's action, which he described as "totally wrong" and "outside accepted diplomatic practices" and which he said senior levels of the MFA viewed as a "flagrant attempt to interfere in Syria's internal affairs." Dabbagh also claimed that Canada had a "double standard" because it did not make public statements about or reactions to Israeli actions in Gaza, but was always ready publicly to criticize abuses in Syria or other Arab countries. The Canadian HOM defended the Embassy's action, and commented that Syrian behavior had made this a legitimate subject of interest for the international community, especially given Syrian accession to various international human rights instruments. He noted that the Syrian MFA had not agreed to meet with the Embassy privately on this issue, as initially requested. He explained that Canada did raise human rights issues with Israeli authorities in bilateral discussions. The Canadian HOM underscored to Ottawa that not only had the press statement not produced any positive results (nor even received any coverage in the Syrian media), but it seemed also to have "crossed some kind of red line for the Syrian authorities."

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